

# THE METEORIC ADVENTURES OF COME-ON CHARLEY

By  
Thomas Addison

## "BIG BUSINESS"

IT WAS one of those lovely February nights in New York when you make up your mind to take out an accident policy the first thing in the morning.

Mr. Teeters surveyed the scene in dismay as he and Mr. Carter made their way down the lobby of the Alhambra Theater, where a long deferred success was nightly packing the house.

A man in a flashy business suit touched the glass and pushed on to the street. Just in front of Charley was a wondrously pretty girl who had half turned her head and had as quickly turned it away on catching Charley's eye.

When they reached the street the girl shrank back from Charley, pale, her hands raised into the shelter of the doorway, again. Her companion, an elderly man, said something to her and started for a limousine which was next in line to the curb directly across the entrance.

He teetered three steps toward the curb, slipped half a dozen more, then lurched to leeward and sailed helplessly past his admirer to the second landing where he brought up, a picture of dismantled dignity and droll despair.

In the meantime Charley and the girl were doing a wholly impromptu sketch of their own. The girl had uttered a little scream when she witnessed her elderly companion's antics on the ice.

Then with one of those amazing feminine impulses as easily to be accounted for as the spots on the sun—she darted forward to save him from a fall. Charley caught her, as her feet went out from under her, as he knew they would, he caught her in his arms and, with the momentum gained, slid with her straight as an arrow to the door of her own machine.

Charley helped her in a bunch of violets fell from her corse crushed and mangled to the ground. Both a little breathless and the maid was rosy red. Charley was more than that—his face was a conflagration. The older man by this time had managed to crawl up to the door.

"By Jove, sir," he gasped, "I am in your debt. That was well done."

"Nothing at all," stammered Charley. "Please, wish I could do it over again."

He blurted this out in a manner so absolutely artless and sincere, and with a face so crimsoned with confusion that the man after a quick survey of him laughed and said:

"My name is George Francis Grant. We may meet again some day."

The girl leaned forward expectantly, but Charley's wits were so flustered then that he gave his name in return. The girl looked back as they drove off, and the smile she flashed at him left Charley a quivering wreck.

His head banged to the pelting storm and his heart hammering in his ears. When he came to fully, Mr. Carter found himself mechanically feeding on a lobster tongue at Charley's, with Mr. Teeters goggling at him from across the table.

And as it happened, the man in the loud clothes and blood-red tie who had been sitting alone at a neighboring table, giving them an occasional curious glance.

Charley pushed his plate away and beckoned to the waiter. The man at the next table who, it seemed, had paid his check in advance, rose and sauntered into the adjoining room.

"Golly, gee, come on," quavered Mr. Teeters, "we got something more coming to us—a baked Alaska, and—"

"Toothache," said Charley shortly, "gratch, too. Shut up."

Mr. Teeters, to whom his chief was revealing himself in a totally unexpected light, winked his mustache and stared, but wisely refrained from further speech.

A shallow canopy of agate glass extended along the front of Charley's, affording some slight shelter from the weather. Charley raised under this to inspect the line of cabs at the curb, and as he did so a woman's voice came to him pleadingly:

"Oh! Won't you please protect me from this man?"

Charley veered sharply to the right. The fellow with the red necktie was standing under the canopy at the other end of the lobby, and he was rapidly door of the car, tall girl who was shrinking from him with outstretched, warding hands.

"Please," she cried again, "Mr. Teeters, with a yell, followed. Charley had seen to it that his walk was sprinkled deep with sand. The foot was secure. But it was quite as good for the man as for Charley, and he made his escape around the corner without a fall.

"Oh! I was so frightened!" panted the girl, who was trying to get home. It was hard going. I fell twice. I stopped here to catch my breath—and she spoke to me so closely. She was so pretty, but of a different type from the other—that other! This girl was dark of hair and eyes, and the other—well, she was blonde, and her voice was soft as the trill of drowsy birds. She was like a fairy princess in her wraps of fur, while this one—well, she was like a girl who had been through a war."

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"Thanks," said Charley soberly. He consulted a telephone directory, made a note from it, and went upstairs and to bed.

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